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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000598

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/C, PRM AND S/WCI
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER
NAIROBI AND ACCRA FOR REFUGEE COORDINATORS
GENEVA FOR REFUGEE OFFICER

FROM BRAZZAVILLE EMBASSY OFFICE

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [CF](#) [UNHCR](#)
SUBJECT: CONGO/B: UNHCR ON REPATRIATION OF DRC REFUGEES,
NOTES PROBLEMS WITH RWANDANS

1. SUMMARY: THE RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE FOR UNHCR
BRAZZAVILLE, JANVIER de RIEDMATTEN, ASKED TO MEET WITH THE
AMBASSADOR APRIL 4 TO BRIEF ON OVERALL UPCOMING REPATRIATION
EFFORTS WITH DRC, RWANDAN, AND CONGO/B REFUGEES. END
SUMMARY.

DRC REFUGEES IN CONGO/B

2. ON DRC REFUGEES, de RIEDMATTEN SAID THAT UNHCR WOULD
BEGIN REPATRIATING REFUGEES ORIGINALLY FROM THE DRC REGION
OF EQUATEUR, WHO ARE IN CAMPS IN THE BETOU AREA OF CONGO/B,
TO THREE DIFFERENT SITES IN DRC: LIBENGA, GEMENA, AND KUNGU.
ONCE REACHING THESE THREE SITES, THE DRC REFUGEES WILL THEN
BE ASSISTED TO RETURN TO THEIR RESPECTIVE VILLAGES.
RIEDMATTEN SAID THAT THE PLANNING GOAL IS TO BEGIN THE
REPATRIATION OF 24,000 DRC REFUGEES IN GROUPS OF 400
STARTING IN APRIL 2005 WITH THE HOPES OF FINISHING BY THE
END OF 2005. THE REPATRIATION WILL BE DONE BY BOAT UP THE
CONGO RIVER FROM BETOU IN THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO (ROC) TAKING
ABOUT 6 HOURS FOR EACH TRIP. TO DATE, OF THE 24,000 DRC
REFUGEES, 10,000 HAVE COMMITTED TO RETURNING. UNHCR IS
CONFIDENT THAT THE REMAINING REFUGEES WILL ALSO RETURN ONCE
THEY SEE THAT THINGS WITH THE FIRST 10,000 HAVE GONE WELL.
MOST OF THE 24,000 DRC REFUGEES IN THIS AREA OF CONGO/B FLED
CONFLICTS IN 1999-2000.

RWANDAN REFUGEES IN CONGO/B:

3. AS FOR THE REPATRIATION OF RWANDAN REFUGEES, RIEDMATTEN
SAID HIS OFFICE HAD JUST REVIEWED NUMBERS, AND THAT THERE
ARE ABOUT 5,000 RWANDANS IN ROC. HE ADDED THAT REPATRIATION
EFFORTS WITH RWANDANS IN CONGO/B HAVE COMPLETELY STALLED.
DESPITE HIS OFFICE'S BEST EFFORTS AND THE EMBASSY/PRM-FUNDED
PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN WHICH PROVIDED FIRST-HAND
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE POSITIVE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR
RETURNING REFUGEES, THERE HAVE BEEN FEW WHO HAVE RETURNED.
RIEDMATTEN NOTED THAT FOLLOWING THE EMBASSY'S PROGRAM, HIS
OFFICE ALSO SENT SEVERAL OF THE LOCAL RWANDAN REFUGEE
LEADERS TO RWANDA WITH UNHCR REPS TO SEE THE ENVIRONMENT
FIRSTHAND. THE TRIPS TO RWANDA PARTICULARLY FOCUSED ON
SENDING REFUGEES FROM THE KINTELE CAMP 45 KILOMETERS NORTH
OF BRAZZAVILLE AND THOSE IN BRAZZAVILLE CITY. UNFORTUNATELY,
INSTEAD OF THE LEADERS RETURNING TO CONGO/B AND PRESENTING A
POSITIVE PICTURE THEY APPEARED TO HAVE MISREPRESENTED THE
ENVIRONMENT CAUSING MANY RWANDAN REFUGEES WHO HAD SIGNED UP
FOR VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION TO CHANGE THEIR MINDS. RIEDMATTEN
ADDED THAT HIS OFFICE RECEIVES CALLS ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS
FROM RWANDAN REFUGEES WHO STATE THAT THEY ARE SCARED TO COME
TO THE UNHCR OFFICE BECAUSE THEY ARE BEING INTIMIDATED AND
THREATENED NOT TO REPATRIATE BY LOCAL RWANDAN REFUGEE
LEADERS. (COMMENT: MANY OF THE RWANDANS HAVE INTEGRATED INTO
CONGOLESE SOCIETY, PARTICULARLY IN THE NORTHERN BORDER AREA
NEAR OUESSO. HOWEVER, THOSE IN THE CAMP IN KINTELE, WHO ARE
MOSTLY WOMAN AND CHILDREN, HAD EARLIER EXPRESSED A DESIRE TO
RETURN TO RWANDA APPARENTLY ARE BEING INITIMATED NOT TO
PURSUE VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION. END COMMENT.)

ROC REFUGEES IN GABON:

4. AMBASSADOR RAISED THE ISSUE OF CONGO/B REFUGEES IN GABON
AND SAID SHE HAD RECEIVED SEVERAL REQUESTS OVER THE LAST TWO
YEARS REGARDING REPATRIATING ROC REFUGEES IN THE UNITED
STATES. SHE ASKED RIEDMATTEN WHAT WAS HIS VIEW OF THE
SENSITIVITY OF THIS ISSUE, AND THE CLAIMS THAT THESE
REFUGEES WOULD FACE HARASSMENT OR PERSECUTION IF THEY
RETURNED. HE SAID THAT THERE IS NO REASON WHY THE ROC
REFUGEES IN GABON CANNOT RETURN TO CONGO/B. HE ADDED THAT HE
TOO HAS EXPLAINED THIS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS TO HIS PARTNER
OFFICES IN GABON AND ELSEWHERE STRESSING THAT THERE IS NO
SECURITY OR PERSECUTION THREAT TO THESE RETURNING CONGO/B
REFUGEES. THE REGIONS OF NAIRI AND KOUILO, WHERE MANY OF THE
ROC REFUGEES IN GABON ARE FROM, HAVE BEEN VISITED BY UNHCR.
THEY HAVE DETERMINED THAT THERE IS NO THREAT TO THESE
REFUGEES. THE UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE ADDED THAT THE REFUGEES
IN GABON MAY NOT WANT TO RETURN FOR ECONOMIC REASONS, BUT

THERE IS NO THREAT TO THEM BY THE GOVERNMENT OR OTHER SOURCES. (NOTE: EMBASSY AGREES WITH THIS ASSESSMENT, AND CONTINUES TO SUPPORT THE VIEW THAT PERMANENT REFUGEE STATUS OR RESETTLEMENT IN THE U.S. SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED AN OPTION SINCE THERE IS NO SECURITY OR PERSECUTION THREAT TO THESE REFUGEES RETURNING TO ROC. VISITING U.S. OFFICIALS AS WELL AS EMBASSY STAFF HAVE BEEN TO THESE AREAS. MANY OTHER CONGOLESE WHO FOUGHT ALONG SIDE FORCES OF FORMER PRESIDENT LISSOUBA HAVE RETURNED WITH NO REPERCUSSION.

BRAZZAVILLE EMBASSY OFFICE - SANDERS
MEECE